FREE!

MMOZine

Issue 18 | January 2009

Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates

PLAYTEST

ALLODS ONLINE

An early contender for fantasy MMO of the year?

HANDS-ON PREVIEW

STAR TREK ONLINE

FIRST CONTACT BEYOND THE NEUTRAL ZONE!

NEOSTEAM + DARKFALL: CONQUER THE SEAS + EARTHRISE + TLBB

+ BETA ACCESS

Global Agenda

Has online combat evolved at last?

+ ON TRIAL

Pirates of the Burning Sea

14 days spent on the ocean waves

+ PLAYABLE

Mortal Online

Is this the ultimate sandbox MMOG?

Welcome to MMOZine

If 2009 was the year of the freeplay MMORPG, 2010 should pan out as the year when the RP could be removed from gaming's unwieldiest acronym. In fact, probably more than any other games to jump aboard the massively multiplayer bandwagon, two of the year's early big releases, Global Agenda and All Points Bulletin, look to highlight just how redundant MMORPG has become as a genre heading.

10 years ago every MMOG was a PC role-playing game, set in a realm populated by Orcs and wizards. We're now seeing MMOGs on consoles. MMOGs that can be played via social networking sites and the end of the dominance of the fantasy setting. Finally it seems that online persistent world gaming has transcended genre and become a pseudo platform it its own right.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

MEGAN CLARK
Mortal Online is dividing opinion but Megan is smitten.

PAUL PRESLEY
The grumpiest man in gaming joins the Star Trek away team.

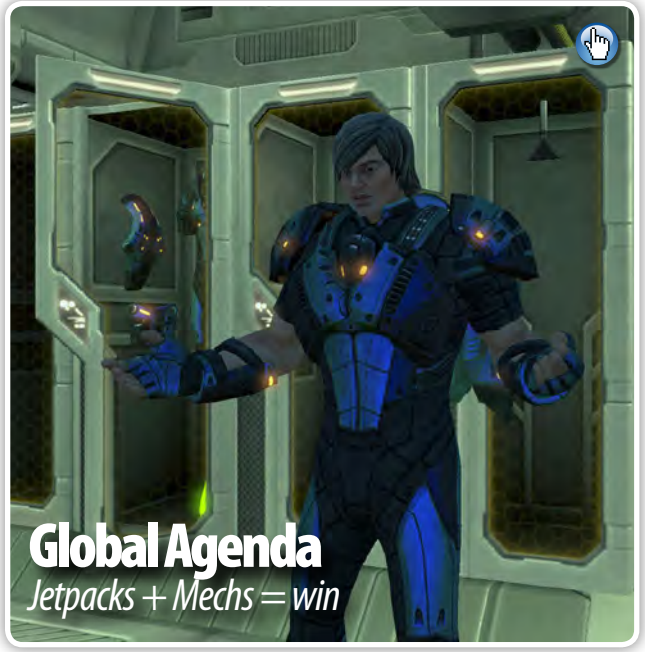
LESLEY SMITH
Will Allods Online pry her away from WoW? We live in hope.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…

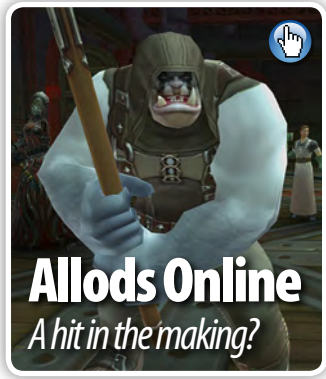
DARKFALL ONLINE: CONQUER THE SEAS

Sink or swim?



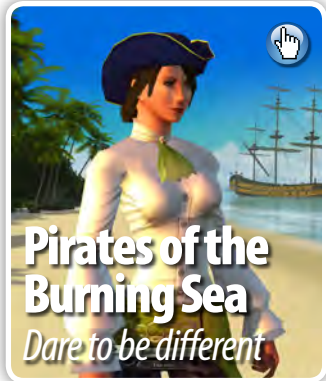
Global Agenda

Jetpacks + Mechs = win



Allods Online

A hit in the making?



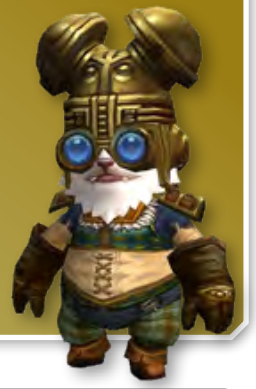
Pirates of the Burning Sea

Dare to be different

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

Earthrise
TLBB
Torchlight
Love
Fantasy Earth Zero
Dark Age of Camelot
Planet Calypso
Star Wars Galaxies
Star Trek Online
Allods Online
Mortal Online
Global Agenda
Darkfall Online: Conquer the Seas
NeoSteam
Pirates of the Burning Seas



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AION

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED FULL SCREEN

A WORLD DIVIDED. A JOURNEY UNCHARTED.

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AION NCSOFT

Earthrise

FIRST LOOK

What comes after the end of the world?

Publisher: Masthead Studios
Developer: Masthead Studios
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.play-earthrise.com
ETA: Spring

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Earthrise

From the preview screens there also seems to be a lot of lush greenery.

What's the story?

World War III has nearly destroyed the Earth and humanity has survived. Now clustered in the city of Sal Vitas, they're using cloning technology and have discovered how to make humans immortal. However the Government – the faction known as the Continoma – also decides who benefits from this, playing God with the lives of the city folk while also offering a safe haven for humanity. However, the rebel faction – known as Noir – fight for freedom, even if it means innocent people must die for their cause.

What do we know?

Earthrise promises everything from 'highly customisable' avatars to the ability to play and advance your character without being online. Rather than being hemmed into a specific class, you'll also be able to really play your toon how you want and learn over 100 different skills. The developers also promise sophisticated PvP and a lore-rich world where you can actively participate by joining the resistance or continue backing the status quo. Oh, and crafters will be getting lots of love as well. However all this comes with a price, as there will be a monthly subscription fee to play – although we don't currently know what this will be.

"Earthrise offers the ability to play and advance your character without being online"

Mutant plants, scary insects. Don't forget your machete and bug spray!

For a post apocalyptic world, this one has a lot of tech.

When do we get more?

With a confirmed Spring release date, a public Beta can't be too far away and you can even sign up via the official site. More information seems to be trickling out every week so keep your eyes peeled. We'll certainly have one of ours on this game.

CBT REGISTRATION OPEN NOW AT ALLODS.GPOTATO.EU

SUBSCRIPTIONLESS*

Register to play subscriptionless for life at ALLODS.GPOTATO.EU

ALLODS ONLINE

VIDEO 1 VIDEO 2 VIDEO 3

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED FULL SCREEN

ATTACK, DEFEND, LOOT OR PLUNDER! SET SAIL INTO THE ASTRAL WITH ALLODS ONLINE

"Allods Online has the potential to offer something really exciting in a genre that struggles to innovate"
(Videogamer.com, August 2009)

* Yep, you read that right. No subscriptions, ever!
Free to play MMORPG with player controlled space battleship in a fantasy space opera universe.
Allods Online features 2 factions, 28 classes, 1500 quests, PvP, PvE, raid, instance, boss monster, pets, guild, craft.

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gPotato ASTRUM NIVAL PC ONLINE

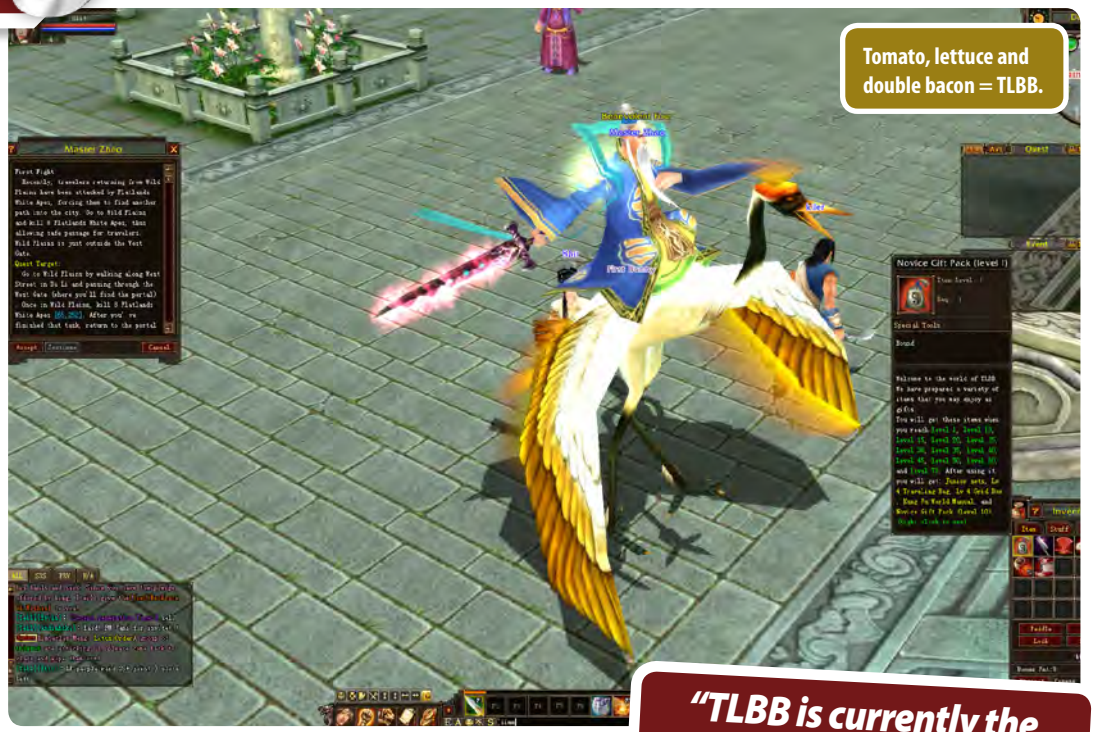
TLBB

FIRST LOOK

Big Brother's Little… something?

Publisher: ChangYou
Developer: ChangYou
Heritage: N/A
Link: http://tlbb.eu.changyou.com
ETA: Spring

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of TLBB



What's the story?

Based on the novel Tiān Lóng Bā Bù (which translates as Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils), TLBB (aka Dragon Oath in the US) bills itself as a martial arts MMORPG. That's not to say it's a game of lightning reflexes in the mould of your typical beat-'em-up, only that the setting is a favourite of classic and contemporary Chinese literature, with nine player classes based around specific combat styles.

What do we know?

According to the trailers and press releases, TLBB has cost £80m to make. To put that in some perspective, that's the cost of two and a half Modern Warfare games, and not far shy of the production budget for the entire Lord of the Rings trilogy. In other words, it's a lot of money, and although it may not be apparent where that budget has been spent if you play the game, that it's currently the third most popular game in China with a claimed 70+ million users (soon to be fourth, we assume, just as soon as WoW gets going again), we can only imagine that administration must swallow up a fair portion of the running costs.

"TLBB is currently the third most popular game in China with a claimed 70+ million users"

When do we get more?

The game has been operating since 2007 in China with the closed Beta running for some months in the West. Signing up and getting into the game is easily done, so if you're curious as to how the game plays just head off to the official site to find out more information. At 600MB, it's a fast download, which is more than can be said for most MMOG releases.

Runes of Magic

FREE 2 PLAY MMORPG

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED FULL SCREEN

Features

- Massively-online-role-playing-game without any fixed costs
- Extensive dual class system with 30 combinations available
- Mounts and pets (horses, tigers and many other creatures)
- More than 1,600 quests and quest series embedded in an epic storyline
- Player vs. player fights (battlegrounds, guild- and arena-battles)
- Instances, dungeons, boss and elite opponents as well as raids with up to 36 players
- Versatile spells and attack-skills plus unique elite-skills
- Combination system with hundreds of runes and crafting materials for individualised items
- Player- and guild-housing

"This is one game everyone should try!"

tentonhammer.com

www.RunesofMagic.com

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Torchlight

FIRST LOOK

The PC craze goes MMO

Publisher: TBD
Developer: Runic Games
Heritage: Diablo, Mythos
Link: www.torchlightgame.com
ETA: 2011

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Torchlight

The scalable graphics will undoubtedly be a delight.

What's the story?

Torchlight takes its name from a mining town which lies over a deposit of the magic-rich ore Ember. Ember is used to create magical artefacts and also serves as an important ingredient in alchemy. As a result, the town of Torchlight has become – in the words of the official site – a 'boom town' but the Ember being mined can become tainted and this causes a whole heap of trouble as darkness creeps into the town.

What do we know?

Very little, but we can infer much from the success of the single-player game. Runic Games boss Max Schaefer has said in interviews that the MMO "Will feature a lot of customisation, an overworld, random and instanced dungeons, PVP and much more!" To get a feel for the game, we can only suggest checking out the action RPG, as it's likely that the MMO will be an adaptation of the original game itself, an expansion of single-player gaming into a multi-player extravaganza.

"We meant to design a tight, clean title that has polish and performance rather than build a sprawling, feature-laden RPG that would take years to develop. The MMO will have more classes, more customisable characters, and more total content, so there should be plenty for Torchlight gamers to look forward to."

Torchlight is known for it's abundance of loot.

Torchlight shares DNA with the likes of Diablo and Warcraft.

When do we get more?

Schafer has confirmed the game will "Be free to play, and will be out in about two years. We like to get Alpha and Beta versions up and running as quickly as possible though, so hopefully we'll have a lot of community interaction during the development cycle."

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LINEAGE II TEAM

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!

Love

Developer: Eskil Steenberg | **ETA:** 2010

The abstract MMOG Love has recently entered a phase of open Beta testing. The one difference between this and the test phases of other games is that you are required to pay for this one. On the basis that it's a measly $3 and the game has been created by one man, it's probably a bargain.

Call of Duty

Developer: Infinity Ward | **ETA:** TBC

Persistent rumours have been in circulation that the makers of the phenomenally successful Modern Warfare are building a team with which to create a Call of Duty persistent world game. Given that Modern Warfare has a few persistent features already, the rumours may have a basis of truth to them.

Fantasy Earth Zero

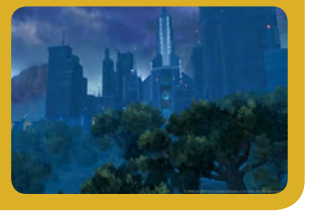
Developer: Square-Enix | **ETA:** Spring

RPG giants Square-Enix are poised to have their 2007 MMO Ring of Dominion released in the West in the next few weeks. It will be set across the world of Melpharia and feature three playable classes, PvP battles for up to 100 people and fast-paced arcade combat. Intriguingly, the game will also offer live voiceovers from NPCs, which could be a little disconcerting.

Star Wars: The Old Republic

Developer: BioWare | **ETA:** Spring 2011

Although many had it down – ourselves included – for release this year, BioWare have revealed that they are working towards launching their Star Wars MMOG early to mid 2011, with Beta testing planned to get under way before the end of 2010. By way of compensation, Dromund Kaas – a Sith stronghold – was revealed as the ninth planet across which players will be able to travel. A year from now. We suspect though that the wait will be worth it.



Dark Age of Camelot

Developer: Mythic | **ETA:** Out now

Last month they dropped Warrior Epic from their roster and now Goa's license to publish and operate Dark Age of Camelot has expired. Goa have been running the game since launch in October 2001 – not without some controversy it should be added. Goa will be continuing to manage Mythic's Warhammer Online, but people are wondering how long that will continue.

Planet Calypso

Developer: MindArk | **ETA:** Out now

The makers of the MMOG formerly known as Project Entropia recently received a significant boost to their Christmas income when a space station in the game was sold for the equivalent of $330,000. The game has regularly broken records for virtual property sales. In 2005 a space resort went for $100,000 – the owner of which has claimed to have made a significant return on his investment.

Star Wars Galaxies

Developer: SOE | **ETA:** Out now

In a galaxy not so far away, the Galactic Civil War update is about to hit Star Wars Galaxies, allowing players to fight for ultimate control of the Galaxy. AT-ATs will be assaulting cities, and to counter it, the Rebels can field the new AT-XT (pictured).

ON THE RADAR

2010
- Age of Conan: Rise of the Godslayer

MARCH
- All Points Bulletin

FEBRUARY
- Global Agenda

FEBRUARY
- Star Trek Online

Star Trek Online

Cryptic takes on the ultimate Star Trek enemy – the diehard fanboy

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Cryptic Studios
Heritage: City of Heroes, Champions Online
Link: www.startrekonline.com
ETA: February

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Star Trek Online

It's the very first screen at the very first stage of your very first character creation that will determine whether or not Cryptic Studios has taken the Star Trek licence in an online direction you're likely to enjoy or not. The first thing you do is decide whether your boldly going starship captain is from the Tactical, Science or Engineering classes, all of which is defined by the type of combat skills you'll specialise in. Tactical officers have good overall damage points, engineers are expert at crowd control and shields, while scientists excel at damage over time.

Pretty much everything in the game is geared around maxing your stats for combat, which means that what Cryptic Studios have done is not create the virtual Trek-based universe we've all imagined, but create a space-themed combat simulator that happens to be wearing Star Trek jumpsuits. Whether this is a good thing or not comes down to your own personal point of view, but for many of us, we can't help but feel you're going to view it as a missed opportunity.

Anyway, STO is split across three main sections: Flying around planetary bodies shooting enemy ships, running around on foot shooting enemy aliens, and navigating through 'Sector Space' – the game's galactic map area that seems to have been plucked out of thin air to replace the on-lore notion of, you know, warping from place to place in the universe.

Progression comes through five ranks (Lieutenant, Lt. Commander, Commander, Captain and Super-

Roll over screen for annotations

Roll over screen for annotations

Star Trek Online cont.

Captain… sorry, Admiral) with 10 'grades' in each. Each new rank opens up a raft of new ship options and new skills to train you and your bridge crew in.

This advancement is earned mainly, it seems from the Beta, by the shooting of bad guys; lots and lots of shooting bad guys. At the lower ranks, everything seems to follow the Champions Online route of forcing everyone along the same path of progression. Mission after mission of flying to a location, shooting enemy ships in orbit, beaming down to shoot some more bad guys, then beaming back for a final battle in space. Repeat until fade. There are some Patrol missions to work through, which vary things by linking multiple sectors together and sometimes removing one or the other aspect of combat, but mainly the fly, shoot, beam, shoot, fly again template holds up.

A touch of diplomacy

So what of the much-vaunted exploration and diplomacy side of things? What it mostly seems to boil down to is searching established systems for 'crafting nodes' (essentially) which you then craft into boosts for your weapons and armour, or generated 'first contact' missions that seem to be little more than ways to add aliens with different stat boosts and skills to your bridge crew 'pets'.

There's not much pretence here that STO is anything other than a combat game in space, so what of that combat? Cryptic has spoken a lot about tactics and strategy, so how does that translate into actual game mechanics? Ship combat is all about turning circles, essentially making sure you don't let one side of your ship's shields drop too low that you become overly vulnerable, while attempting to do precisely

HOW IT WORKS

Star Trek Online is mainly split across three different areas…

SECTOR SPACE | **PLANETARY SPACE** | **GROUND AREAS**

A stylised galaxy map containing local systems, 'gates' to other sectors (Klingon space, Romulan space, Cardassian space, etc.), wandering NPCs for fighting with, fellow Captains jetting about and a confusing mass of wavy blue lines, which somehow helps to remind you that this is basically the navigation section of Pirates of the Burning Sea in space.

STAR TREK ONLINE

Star Trek Online cont.

that to the enemy. It's very colourful and fast-paced, and although it does make you think a little about diverting power and your turret arcs and the like, the fast pace of it all actually seems to stop things from ever becoming overly tactical and keeps things rooted in the more traditional MMO attritional fights we've all become used to. Certainly there's none of the classic Kirk vs. Khan Mutara Nebula tension going on where every shot counts. There may still be time for Cryptic to tweak things like pace prior to launch, but everything on display so far seems to suggest it's more or less happy with how things are. Again, whether you will be happy with that is going to be down to personal choice.

Taking liberties

That's the overall feeling you get from most of STO… that Cryptic has taken a lot of liberties with the licence in order to fit in a lot of the usual MMO tropes, regardless of whether they fit the setting or not. In its current state, STO is certainly not about to blow away any of the existing MMO conventions, or win awards for originality – or, indeed, polish. Current favourite bug is how, when exiting the utterly pointless 'bridge view' to actually fly your ship, your captain 'beams out').

Whether or not you can accept the direction Cryptic is going is going to come down to how much of a Trek fanboy you are. A lot of people are saying that it's the diehard Trek fans that will get the most out of STO. In actual fact, with all the ways Cryptic is avoiding capturing the essence of what Star Trek really is, it's the opposite that will most likely be true. Diehard fans will almost certainly hate what they're doing to their beloved franchise. The question that remains is whether there's enough of a game here to therefore attract those that aren't coming here solely because it says Star Trek on the box. That's where Cryptic may find that its real challenge will lie.

"A lot of people are saying that it's the diehard Trek fans that will get the most out of Star Trek Online"

MMOZine Verdict

Enjoyable, but we're not entirely sure who the game is likely to appeal to

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Allods Online

Into the Astral and beyond

Publisher: gPotato
Developer: Astrum Nival
Heritage: Rage of Mages, Heroes of Might and Magic V
Link: http://allods.gpotato.com
ETA: Spring

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Allods Online

Allods Online is weird, but in a very good way. It's also free and is already being mentioned in the same breath as WoW (it even has Orcs and Elves). So-called 'freemium' MMOs are all the rage at the moment, so what makes this one from Russia so special? In a world where MMOs are two a penny, developers have to meet the high expectations of a growing market, and it takes an awful lot to impress the community of hardcore MMO gamers out there. Allods Online is just the latest in a long line of titles that are just below the radar of popular games, but we have a sneaking suspicion that it has a chance to make the break into greatness.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SARNAUT

The universe of Allods Online centres on the Sarnaut. Once upon a time it was a peaceful world until the Great Cataclysm split into lots of pieces (or Allods) which drifted in the magical-rich Astral void. Legend says that the peaceful Gibberlings were the ones to discover the magical stones which allowed travel in the Astral, and that allowed them to explore beyond their own Allod.

Time passed and the races formed two opposing factions who fought against each other over territory within the Void, as well as against the demons and other denizens who dell within. New races appeared in the form of the Arisen and the Xadaganians. War continued to rage in the Astral and has now intensified due to the discovery of a new Allod slap bang between the capitals of the Empire and the League. Who'll claim it? You're going to have to play the game to find out...

Allods Online cont.

Allods combines the traditional fantasy elements often found in MMOs with a touch of sci-fi. Set in a universe that is reminiscent of Kingdom Hearts – with a dash of Tron for good measure – it offers multiple environments to explore, all linked by a void filled with coloured vein-like threads called Astral. The game's two factions – the League and the Empire – have been at each other's throats for a thousand years and the creation of ships which can traverse the Astral has only taken their feud to another level of bitterness. Just like NCsoft did for last year's hit Aion, so Allods Online crafts an intricate universe dominated by PvP, but that's not even half of what this game has to offer.

The Astral ships themselves are not spaceships, but actual galleons that have magical generators powered by a suitably mystical orb at their core which allow them to travel outside of an Allod. This old-fashioned look gives an almost Disney feel to the game but also makes it even more charming.

Beautifully designed

But of course, that's not all there is to it. Each Allod is beautifully designed with a striking amount of detail given this is a free-to-play game. Indeed, even at open Beta, it screams detail. It's the little things you notice, like how the opening screen shifts and becomes a mural in the background of the nice-looking character creation screen. Or the hub cities you reach after the story-driven tutorial – they're huge and quite beautiful.

The avatars themselves are striking and choice is definitely the name of the game. As with every MMO under the sun, you first have to pick a side. In this case you've got the goody-two-shoes League and the more nefarious Empire. After that it's a matter of class, literally, and there's a lot to choose from, with eight archetypes and a

AVATARS EVERYWHERE

Creating a character is an important part of the game, and Allods Online goes that extra mile

ARISEN **ELVES** **GIBBER-LINGS**

Each of the six races has their own unique look and really awesome armour. Cyberpunk meets Egypt, anyone?

Allods Online cont.

whopping 28 classes. Race-wise you have six choices. The League have the Kanians and Gibberlings, while the Empire have Orcs, the Arisen and the almost unpronounceable Xadaganians.

Each race has its own unique look, from the zombie-like Arisens with their penchant for Egyptian-style finery mixed with technological augmentation, to the brutish Orcs, who aren't green and have massive tusks. But, regardless of side, the clear favourites have to be the Gibberlings – think a slightly cuter version of Gizmo the gremlin. Indeed, they're sure to become the game's unofficial mascot, much like WoW has the humble menace known as the Murloc. The difference is that you don't play as one, rather you get a trio to toy with. Even better you can customise them individually.

The world itself is just as carefully crafted, and the UI will be instantly familiar to anyone who has played WoW, Aion, Free Realms or any other MMO in the last few years. It feels polished as well, which is always a good sign – especially when a game hasn't even been publicly released yet. The mythology is rich and invites you to enter a fascinating world jam-packed with lore. The graphics are slick and fire really does look like fire. Yes, console-standard graphics are now part and parcel of PC games but it's still surprising when they

"Allods Online is likely to become known as one of the unlikely hits of 2010"

make it into MMOs, especially a free one like Allods Online.

Normally when free-to-play MMOs are mentioned in the same breath as the giants of the genre, it's worrying. Fears of overhyped expectations can be allayed here though, as Allods Online is likely to become known as one of the unlikely hits of 2010. It looks great, it plays well and feels finished. It's a game which makes you want to play more and offers something for every kind of gamer from the hardcore raider to the casual quester. It may not offer anything new, but Allods Online is definitely one to watch.

It's not the bridge of the Enterprise, but who cares.

The interface will be easy to grasp for anyone who's played an online game before.

MMOZine Verdict

Gorgeous and ripe with lore, Allods Online is a hit in the making

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%

Mortal Online

Who wants to live forever?

Publisher: Star Vault
Developer: Star Vault
Heritage: None
Link: www.mortalonline.com
ETA: January

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Mortal Online

Many gamers have perceived Mortal Online as a game akin to Darkfall Online. We were wrong. Mortal Online is a true sandbox MMORPG; a world where nearly anything should be possible. No matter whether you prefer PvP, crafting, PvE, role-play or the social interactions of being a part of a virtual community, we are promised it all here.

The level of immersion is potentially amazing. Finally we'll have the opportunity to step into a landscape painted by a master and discover what hides on the other side of the mountain pass. Shadows move across the ground as clouds pass before the sun, and a lake glitters in the distance. You hear the cries of birds high overhead while others twitter from nearby trees.

Surrounding you are the soft footfalls and gentle sounds of wildlife browsing the hillsides. The wind whispers against the grasses

The crafters are truly enjoying the crafting system despite its many bugs.

"Mortal Online is a true sandbox MMORPG; a world where nearly anything should be possible"

Roll over screen for annotations

Meduli is a small town on the coast of Myrland.

Fabernum is protected by high walls and steep mountains.

This coastal town provides access to banking, crafting and NPC vendors.

Mortal Online cont.

and through the trees. Lost in the sounds, you can almost smell the scents of earth and pine. Suddenly you notice the sound of human footsteps behind you and your body tenses. They're close! Cursing yourself for your inattention, you wheel around to find the source, praying that you get your weapon out before the first blow falls.

You spin, ready for the attack… and relax as the other player hails you. He's no player-killer. He's simply a crafter out cutting wood needed to build a bridge near his house. As the conversation continues, you find that there's room for another house or two near his. Perfect! That's exactly what you were looking for. You follow your new neighbour to a spot near the lake and begin building your home. That bridge is going to be convenient, as is having a neighbour who is a craftsman. Maybe he will help you tame one of those wolves you saw in the forest…

While the danger of player killers is very real in Mortal Online, PvP isn't the focus of the game. The world simply *is*, and PvP is a part of it.

In addition to real-time combat, Mortal Online also features one of the most in-depth crafting systems ever seen. Core features include modular player housing and a skill-based character development system similar to Ultima Online – which comes complete with taming and stealing skills.

VIEW FROM THE CHOP

With an enforced first-person view, Mortal Online fosters an eerie sense of foreboding that is refreshing in an MMORPG. First entering the game is reminiscent of the first minutes playing Morrowind, but how long that feeling will go on remains to be seen.

FIRST-PERSON VIEW

REAL-TIME COMBAT

The first-person view is a necessary part of combat system. Aiming is accomplished by looking where you want to hit or block – there is no targeting here.

Another fascinating aspect of Mortal Online will be PvE. In other games, PvE consists of fighting the same boss over and over, with the same group make up, the same strategy and the same loot. That's not the case in MO. The bosses are one-time spawns, tied closely to the storyline and played by game staff. It should be brilliant – a boss who genuinely fights back. Once the players manage to kill and loot him, the storyline then continues.

Community involvement and role-play do not stop here. There

Mortal Online cont.

will be a special 'event team' drawn largely from volunteers in the player community who keep the story alive. MO's Community Manager Alex Politz (aka Maerlyn), is in charge of this team. He says he's "Not a big fan of role-playing in an MMO, because most of them have done it so wrong." He intends to change that with Mortal Online. "People have to take role playing seriously," he says. "They don't have to act on it, but they will have to acknowledge the possibility of it being real."

Mortal Online is an intensely interesting game that envelops all play styles equally. No part of the world or skill system feels like it has been added on. The game will certainly be worth playing… eventually. Unfortunately, as is the case with any small company, funds aren't infinite and money needs to start flowing in rather than out. Star Vault seems to have hit that point in the development of Mortal Online.

The game will be releasing soon and it's just not ready. While the server is mostly stable, there are still complications with the systems that will cause a lot of player frustration. There are lag spikes and client crashes. Textures refuse to load, menus lock up and the placeholder crafting GUI makes an already complex system even harder to decipher. The programmers work long hours and are consistently making improvements. The fact is that they simply need more time.

> *"Mortal Online is a interesting game that envelops all play styles equally"*

All things considered, it's good that the Mortal Online community is rather small. MO has the potential to be a very good game, but it's going to need a lot of patience and forgiveness at launch. We have confidence though, that Star Vault will tough it out and that the game will improve. They are veteran online gamers who haven't forgotten where they came from, and they know exactly where they want to go. Getting there, however, will be quite an adventure.

Many small NPC villages like Vadda lie scattered across the continent.

Wildlife abounds, but seeing them and catching them are two different stories.

MMOZine Verdict

It has the potential to be an amazing game, but it's going to be a rough launch

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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Global Agenda

Publisher: Hi-Rez Studios
Developer: Hi-Rez Studios
Heritage: None
Link: www.globalagendagame.com
ETA: February

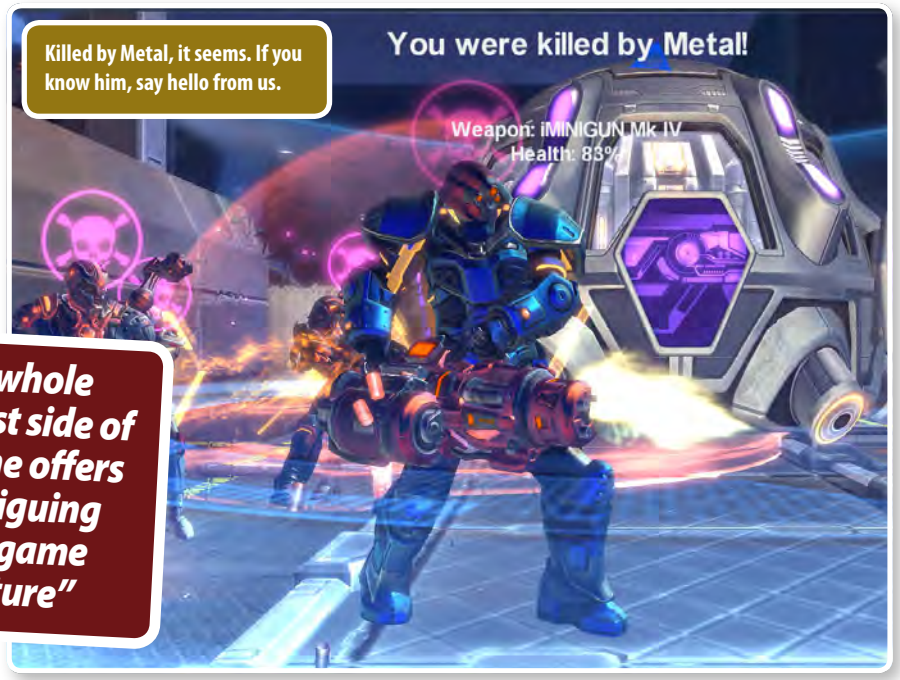
PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Global Agenda

Just what the world needs

If you think back to when WWII Online and PlanetSide promised – and largely delivered – combined arms battles between hundreds of players across vast and intimidating maps, it seems weird that no-one has tried to emulate them in the intervening years. Instead we've seen a succession of fairly traditional shooters – Team Fortress 2, Left 4 Dead, Call of Duty. All of them massive and multiplayer, but hardly massively multiplayer.

Hoping to relieve the situation is Global Agenda, a sci-fi shooter that borrows much from the aforementioned blockbusters and just a little from the forgotten trailblazers. In other words, the battles are small-scale – with 10 operatives per Strike Team in Alliance vs Alliance maps and four-player co-op the standard for PvE missions.

Where the massively multiplayer comes in is with the Conquest campaign game, where agencies



"The whole Conquest side of the game offers an intriguing meta-game structure"

Roll over screen for annotations

Everyone is spoiling for a fight.
The Global Mission Map allows you to join into active missions. You can choose matchmade missions against other players, or 4-man strikes against the commonwealth.
Press U to open Global Mission Map

Jet packs were made for this.

Robotics build shield walls, and very useful they are too.

Global Agenda cont.

(guilds) and alliances fight across a persistent grid of hexes. How it works is that Strike Team leaders will bid for a hex to attack into, at which point the defenders can put together a counter. Both forces can take with them siege vehicles, mechs and defensive platforms, all of which will stay deployed in the territory if not destroyed. With these expensive tactical augmentations to the main FPS action – along with the need to bid to even make an attack – the idea is that assaults against the opposition have to weighed against income. Obviously the balance that needs to be struck is to make sure that it isn't too expensive to wage war so that players have to senselessly grind PvE missions to earn credits, or so cheap that combat is meaningless.

The whole Conquest side of the game offers an intriguing meta-game structure, one that allows large alliances to command significant territory and resources. But with battles limited to single Strike Teams, numbers alone cannot win battles. By also locking out zones at certain times of the day, the aim is to put a stop to large 24/7 alliances steam-rolling their way across the map when their more localised enemies are tucked up in bed and dreaming about advanced military strategies. It's a system designed to keep things fair and that can only be a good thing.

As for the battles themselves, we have to admit that our experiences in the Beta has been limited to those outside of the Conquest mode, where Global Agenda is structured as a fairly typical multiplayer shooter. In spite of the sci-fi setting, the game immediately feels closer to Team Fortress 2 than perhaps any other FPS, with four player classes – Assault, Medic, Recon (sniper/spy) and Robotics (engineer) – as well

DOME SWEET DOME

The Dome City is the central player lobby, offering among other services, a number of portals to various types of conflict arenas

VIRTUAL REALITY | GLOBAL MAP | CONQUEST MAP

The VR Training Arena doesn't reward or track kills, but it does allow you to just jump in and play about without any fear of making a fool of yourself.

Global Agenda cont.

as control point and payload maps. What literally lifts Global Agenda above the cartoon violence of TF2 is the fact that all agents can fire up their jet packs and shoot off across the map, allowing the newly respawned to get back to the action quickly. Consequently it's all fairly hectic, and yet with no hit zones and therefore no headshots, it's also rather forgiving.

Enter the pleasuredome

Where the game actually feels and looks more like an MMO is in the dome areas. These are hub zones where weapons are banned and agents can run around buying supplies, crafting (only implants at the moment), assigning skillpoints, lining up for missions and doing what all newcomers do – trying out all the pointless dance emotes.

The dome area, with it's various co-op and arena missions, is open to all, with the Conquest mode and various other sundry features requiring a monthly subscription. Purchasers will gain access to Conquest for a month as a matter of course, after which they can elect to go free and play the game as a regular multiplayer shooter, or continue paying a premium for the added level of persistence. Having not tried Conquest, we can't give much of an indication as to whether Global Agenda will be worth paying monthly for premium access, but on the basis of what we have played, it should certainly be worth the initial investment.

Having thrown a good 20 hours into playing the Beta, we remain impressed. The Recon and Robotics classes are a scream to play as, while the Medic and Assault are a little dry up to level 10, but only because they do exactly what you expect and very little else. As a shooter, Global Agenda is shaping up to be a very solid game with plenty to recommend it. Although the action is less twitch-based than some we could mention, the inclusion of jet packs can only be a good thing.

"Having thrown a good 20 hours into the Beta, we remain impressed"

MMOZine Verdict

A heady evolution of the traditional shooter, wrapped in MMO goodness

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

85%

Publisher: Aventurine SA
Developer: Aventurine SA
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.darkfallonline.com
OUT NOW

Darkfall Online: Conquer the Seas

> "Nearly every aspect of the game is controllable, and PvP is the rule"

Darkfall may not have been what we expected, but it has created its own niche

Aventurine's Darkfall Online hit the market last year with a disastrous launch that is sure to become a legend in the MMORPG community. Now, nearly a year later, DFO has released its newest expansion – cunningly titled Conquer the Seas – and created a wholly new niche in the market. What was originally advertised as a sandbox MMORPG with PvP, PvV, crafting, player housing, and a truly player-run economy has morphed into an altogether different animal, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

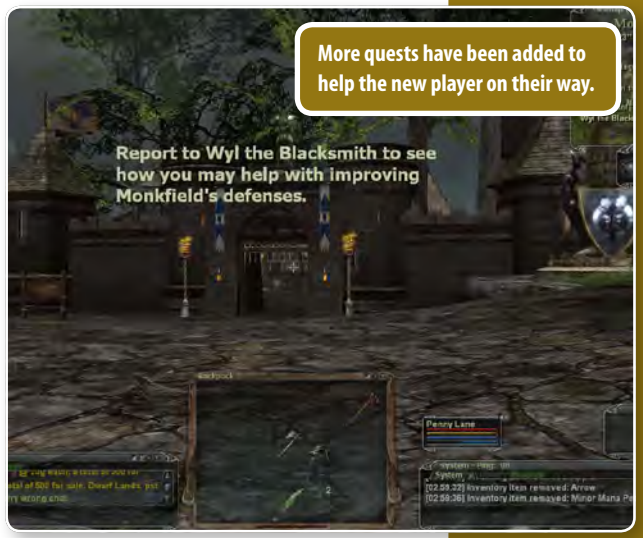
Player housing comes is various sizes from cottages to keeps.

The heart and soul

Global domination, territorial control, political strife and immense player vs player combat have become the heart and soul of Darkfall Online. There are two massive servers, one in North America and one in Europe. Both of them are home to thousands of concurrent players, hundreds of clans, and dozens of player-controlled villages, hamlets and cities. The result is a fluid struggle for dominance. Powerful coalitions are created and destroyed as a result of ever-changing alliances and betrayals.

Nearly every aspect of the game is controllable, and PvP is the rule. Small groups of players vie for control of the best monster camps, clans compete for control of cities and allied nations struggle for control of the map. Players can even leave their mark on NPC cities in the form of Clan Stations which display the name of the controlling clans in huge, shiny, 3D lettering. Piracy is also a viable option, with impressive craftable ships, sea fortresses and very nice floating villages up for grabs.

The combat is fast, first-person, and twitch based with no auto targeting.



More quests have been added to help the new player on their way.

Treasure chests have a chance of spawning player housing deeds.

You have killed 4 of 4 Goblins.
You killed Goblin Fighter!
Your mastery of Polearms has increased.
You wrecked Goblin Fighter for 12 points of Health
You drained Goblin Fighter for 0 points of Stamina
You were injured by Goblin Fighter and lost 9 points of Health
You were drained by Goblin Fighter and lost 18 points of Stamina
You wrecked Goblin Fighter for 16
Four goblins lie slain before you. Claim your reward from
Penny Lane
[02:53:11] You wrecked Goblin Fighter for 12 points of Health
[02:53:11] You killed Goblin Fighter!
The awkward GUI is one feature that hasn't changed much.

Darkfall Online cont.

These qualities make Darkfall feel like a fantasy-based first-person shooter. Aventurine has been constantly tweaking and rebalancing the siege, PvP and weapons/armour systems, displaying a devotion to quality combat. The fighting style is certainly not for everyone, but if you love twitchy, hectic PvP and battles involving hundreds of players then you'll definitely enjoy it.

The class system is based on skills rather than levels, but there is no cap on the number of skills you can learn. As a result, nearly all players are hybrids, using melee, archery or magery as the situation warrants. The downside is that everyone else can do what you do, and eventually you'll be able to do everything. Although skill gain rates have supposedly been increased, the game is still an epic grind. This is made even more difficult by the fact that there's just not much for players to do, especially in the solo game.

The starting cities do feature quest chains to help new players get some gear and learn the ropes. Once these quests end, however, the game becomes distinctly more difficult. Skill gains don't scale well with the quest chains, and new players are just not ready for anything tougher than Goblins. Add the low skills to the fact that most monsters require a group effort and it it's not worth playing as a solo player. Clans are required for survival unless you enjoy spending your time endlessly hacking the lowest level mobs in the game.

DUAL CLASS SYSTEM

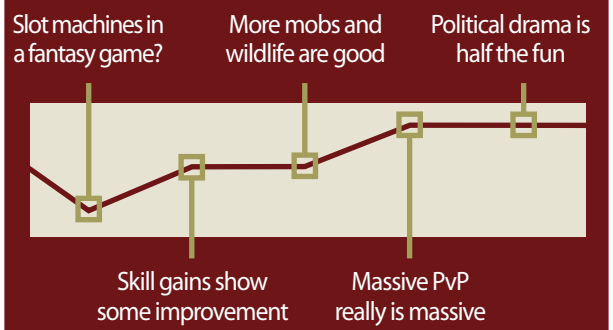
Aventurine has added new points of contention to the game, further enhancing its focus on PvP and territory control

CLAN STATION **VILLAGE CONTROL** **SEA FORTRESS**

Clans now have the opportunity to advertise their supremacy by controlling towers in the NPC cities.

Although more content and lore are being added frequently, and steps have been taken to improve existing content, there just isn't much for a player to do right now. Macroing and hacking are still serious problems in the game, but they are just symptoms of the immense skill grind and inability of players to solo content without using third-party programs. Every game has its cheaters, but in Darkfall poor game design has created an environment where cheating is the only way casual players can experience what

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Slot machines in a fantasy game?
More mobs and wildlife are good
Political drama is half the fun
Skill gains show some improvement
Massive PvP really is massive

Roll over screen for annotations

Darkfall Online cont.

content exists. The developers have attempted to mitigate the damage by adding gold sinks, but even those don't seem to be well considered – one has to wonder how slot machines tie into the lore of a fantasy-based role-playing game.

Regardless of its many problems, the game does have redeeming qualities. Darkfall has morphed into a strange yet intriguing version of Age of Empires turned MMORPG-FPS, where players can walk through the city streets and the armies are composed of hundreds of real players – each with their own agenda. If you enjoy world domination in a fantasy setting, Darkfall Online certainly offers plenty of that. Despite the carnage, Agon is truly beautiful and almost delicate, with intricate foliage, fantastic monster skins and wonderfully realistic wildlife. There's simply nothing else like it.

Right now, in its current state, Darkfall caters to the jaded, bored, hardcore, PvP gamer with a FPS skill set. It's not polished, it's not user friendly, and it's not easy, but if you can overlook its flaws you might just enjoy it. Regardless, Darkfall really is breaking new ground, and Darkfall players are participating in the birth of something wholly new to the MMORPG world. It will be interesting to watch this game grow up and see what it eventually matures into.

MMOZine Verdict

A flawed MMO that still has plenty of charm

- ✓ The combat really takes skill
- ✓ Darkfall should mature well
- ✗ Slot machines in an MMO?

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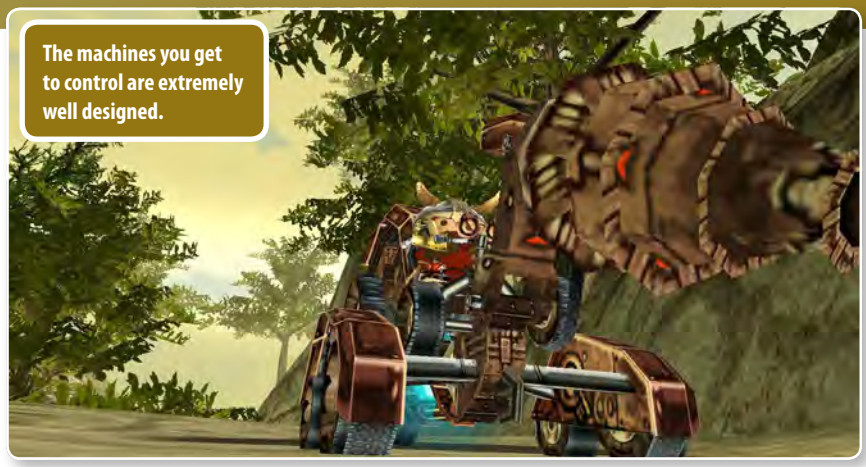
NEO STEAM

Publisher: gamigo/ Atlus Online
Developer: JoyImpact
Heritage: Wyd, Tantra, Starcrash
Link: http://neosteam.gamigo.com
OUT NOW

NeoSteam

Technology doesn't always save the day…

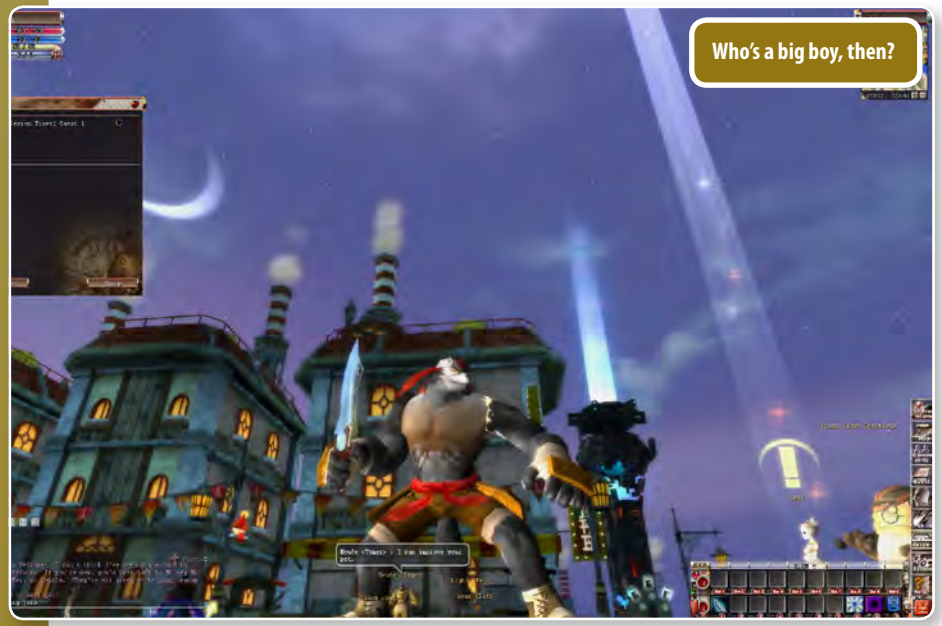

The machines you get to control are extremely well designed.

Grind missions are bad enough, but when you're tasked with collecting freshly laid excrement from the bowels of one creature in order to free some necessary piece of equipment that's steadfastly lodged in the turd of another, it's not long before you start to question what you're doing. Thankfully, in NeoSteam the alarm bells have already been ringing loudly for some time.

We could rattle on about this being yet another game from Asia that has been poorly localised, but that would be a little unfair. The translation is passable – we didn't spot too many spelling errors, but the tragic line-breaks and horrible user interface are enough to put you off the game before the mission descriptions appear.

It's not as if NeoSteam is offering much that's original. Player classes are standard fare and the game borrows from the same template countless others have done. The steampunk setting was done before in games like Rose Online and RF Online, both of which offered a more vibrant palette and played a hell of a lot better than this game does. Granted, NeoSteam offers a much broader arsenal of technology to tinker with as the game progresses, some of which looks very cool it must be said, but getting your hands on it means you have to be a very forgiving gamer, because apart from everything else, the game wants you to grind, grind, grind…

The last year has seen the release of much better freeplay titles, among them ones that have taken a more considered approach in attracting Western gamers to their Asian charms – Atlantica Online is one title that's far more worthy of your attention, Runes of Magic another. If, however, it's the fusion of techno-trousers and fantasy that primarily appeals, the imminent Allods Online is probably the game to head for. NeoSteam has a fantastic title, but that's about all. ●


Who's a big boy, then?

MMOZine Verdict

You won't have to look far to find a better game

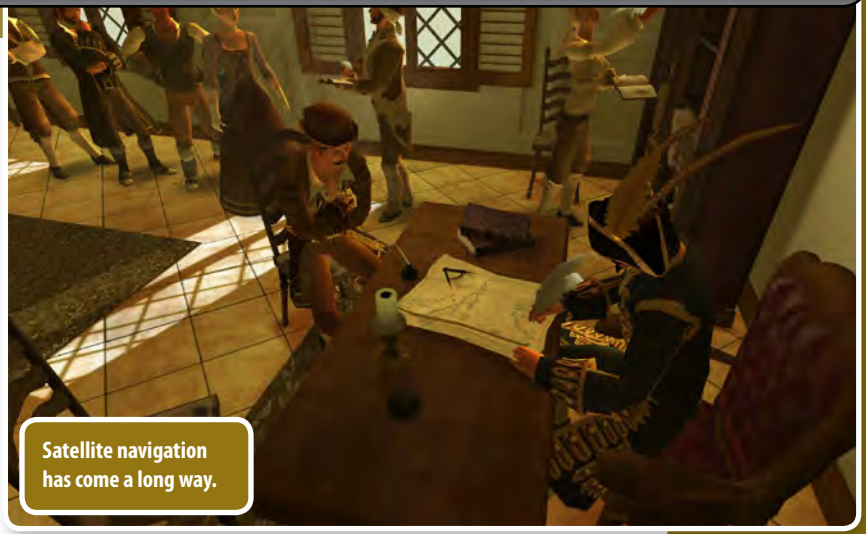
- Nothing that hasn't been done before
- Dated presentation
- A painful grind

PLAY AGAIN

Around a world in 14 days*

(*or however long the trail period lasts)

Part 6: Pirates of the Burning Sea


Satellite navigation has come a long way.

Richie Shoemaker continues his trial-surfing adventure, this time on the high seas…

You have to feel sorry for the makers of Pirates of the Burning Sea. Riding on the crest of a wave in the wake of a certain movie starring Johnny Depp in pantomime pirate mode, it seemed a sure-fire massively multiplayer hit prior to its release. Then the entirely predictable happened. Pirates became immediately unfashionable again, thanks in part to the Internet over-indulging in all things 'yarr', but just as Keanu Reeves had experienced with The Matrix, the decline in popularity was mostly because of a couple of terrible movie sequels.

Pirates of the Burning Sea eventually launched after the utterly abominable At World's End in January 2008, quietly trying to come to terms with a world that had grown to love ninjas more that salty seadogs. It was a shame, because just like The Matrix Online, Pirates of the Burning Sea was a lot better than people gave it credit for. However, unlike the Matrix MMOG that was force-fed a red pill last summer, Pirates still has broadsides blazing and is looking better than ever.

A busy day for the residents of Punctuation Street.

All the girls love a man in uniform.

Church attendances have been declining ever since.

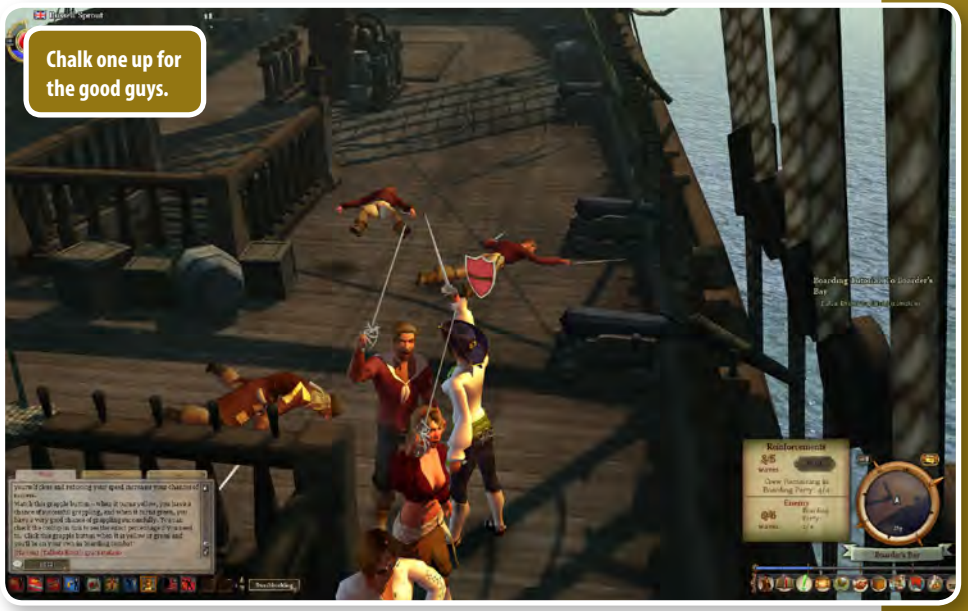
Replay continued

If you'd care to play the Pirates trial today, you'd likely come away feeling more than a little impressed, especially if you were nonplussed when the game first set sail. You might also still feel a little bit intimidated because it remains a complex game – the trading part especially. Okay, it's not likely to make you feel as stupid as EVE does, but when something requires a little effort and when you're playing a trial, it's always better to go straight for the the fun stuff.

In the case of Burning Sea, the fun stuff is obviously the ship combat and as you would hope and expect, sea battles crop up regularly and the process of trying to fill an enemy hull with shot remains the best feature of the game. In all honesty, ship-to-ship combat is probably better here than in Star Trek Online, which conducts its outer space combat in a very similar – albeit considerably more approachable – way.

The problem with Burning Sea is perhaps that it feels so insular. It's not a particularly well-populated game, and with much of the game instanced, it's likely that you'll go through the entire 14-days without much need to socialise at all. Consequently quests can start to get samey. But because the presentation, music and setting are so charming, it's very hard to dislike the game in any way.

Pirates of the Burning Sea is a labour of love for developers and players alike. A niche game that punches well above its draft, it's one you can really grow to love. I'm just not sure 14 days is enough time for that desire to flourish unless you're lucky enough to make the most of your time.



Chalk one up for the good guys.

And it's back to port for a pie and a pint.

In MMOZine Issue 19

GLOBAL AGENDA

Is this the best MMO shooter since PlanetSide?
Read our definitive review next issue

PLUS!

Reviews of Allods Online, Star Trek Online and EverQuest II: Sentinel's Fate and the latest on All Points Bulletin, Black Prophecy and Star Wars: The Old Republic

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